DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 927 EA 022 413

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TITLE	Empowering Communities for School Reform: The Annie E. Casey Foundation's New Futures Initiative. Final Deliverable.
INSTITUTION	National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, Madison, WI.; Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Madison.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Oct 89
CONTRACT	G-008690007-89
NOTE	35p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Community Programs; *Cooperative Programs; *Dropout Prevention; *Dropout Programs; *High Risk Students; Power Structure; Secondary Education; *State Action
IDENTIFIERS	Annie E Casey Foundation; *Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Despite many responses to the dropout problem, it remains unclear which school strategies are successful with at-risk students. State initiatives are well intentioned, but have certain limitations. Criteria such as local accountability, school-by-school regeneration and reform, longitudinal strategies, and horizontal coordination are needed. This paper describes the Annie E. Casey Foundation's New Futures Initiative, a project drawing on these criteria to help communities assist their at-risk youth. Community partnerships were created in five cities (Dayton, Ohio; Lawrence, Massachusetts; Little Rock, Arkansas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Savannah, Georgia) to bring about improved school achievement, reduced dropout and teen pregnancy rates, and increased young adult employment. The paper focuses only on the educational aspects of the initiative. In each city, the heart of New Futures is a "community collaborative" charged with planning, coordinating, and implementing specific youth-serving programs. Governed by broadly representative boards, these "collaboratives" are empowered with the political authority to plan and execute policy. Cities will assess their plan's success through a set of 10 outcome indicators stipulated by the Casey Foundation. It is too early to know whether the specific activities generated by New Futures will constitute systemic reforms that enhance the educational outcomes of most students at risk. Certain questions have already arisen concerning the collaboratives' ability to represent more than the traditional power elite, to bring about systemic change, and to effect a reform agenda generated outside the schools. As an experiment, however, New Futures contains documents that could lead to the development of a broad commitment to the welfare of all children in the five participating cities, especially in their approach to issues of ownership and involvement. (20 references) (MLH)

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EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR SCHOOL REFORM: THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION'S NEW FUTURES INITIATIVE

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October 1989

This paper was prepared at the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (Grant No. G-008690007-89) and by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, School of Education, University of WI-Madison. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supporting agencies.

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EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES FOR SCHOOL REFORM: THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION'S NEW FUTURES INITIATIVE

Gary Wehlage, Pauline Lipman and Gregory Smith

I. AT-RISK STUDENTS: THE PROBLEM AND THE RESPONSE

During the decade of the 1980s, students dropping out of school has increasingly come to the fore as a serious problem. For individuals, dropping out is seen as a problem because it results in limited opportunities for economic security and full participation in the society. From a societal perspective, dropping out is generally a concern because the full development of the talents and skills of all citizens is essential for a democratic society. While dropping out is often destructive to individual youth, it also carries a high social welfare cost and loss of economic potential for local communities and the nation. In a world making the transition to a post-industrial society, the nation's dropout rate takes on greater significance because the present generation of youth will be increasingly asked to engage in problem solving and higher order analytical tasks integral to highly technological work. The need for more, and more complex, education is widely recognized as one of the nation's top priorities (Dertouzos et al., 1989).

The consequences of students leaving school early have placed dropout prevention high on the educational agenda, and by now nearly every school system in the country has some kind of dropout prevention program. Despite many responses to the problem, it is not clear which, if any, school strategies are successful with the at-risk student. In part, this uncertainty is due to the complexity of factors that result

in dropping out. Many educators have argued that social conditions outside the school affect students' success and their persistence to graduate, and that schools are not in a position to alter these conditions. Research provides general support for this point of view by linking dropouts with certain family and social background characteristics. For example, students from low socioeconomic status homes and minorities are more likely to drop out (Kolstad and Owings, 1986; Peng, 1983; Rumberger, 1987). Another theme in the research on dropouts focuses on students' individual problems that interfere with school success such as pregnancy, drug abuse, mental health problems and learning difficulties. However, research also offers a third set of findings focused on school factors that influence students to leave before graduation. In fact, the best predictors of dropping out include retention in grade, course failure and credit deficiency, and disciplinary infractions that result in suspension (Ekstrom et al., 1986).

Dropping out probably is best seen as resulting from a multiplicity of factors that contribute to school failure and discouragement about the prospects of graduation. Given the complexity of the problem, how can schools best respond to students at risk of dropping out? Most studies of dropouts have not provided decisive answers. We still lack knowledge of the kinds of initiatives and reforms that will not only keep youth in school, but more importantly, educate them and prepare them for full participation in adult life.

At issue for policymakers is the development of a variety of strategies aimed at engendering both the will and capacity to deal with this issue. In response to the dropout problem, policymakers at the state level, in particular, have introduced a wide range of initiatives. While action at this level is certainly important, we wish to argue that the public commitment and finely tuned programmatic responses needed to reduce dropout rates might be developed more effectively within the communities in which this problem exists. In what follows, we describe and critique a variety of state-level initiatives, drawing from this discussion a set of criteria that, if followed, might better lead to the structural reforms we believe necessary to foster the educational success of all students. We then move on to a description of a community-based effort in five mid-sized cities that could potentially overcome some of the weaknesses we perceive in dropout prevention efforts currently coming from state policymakers. While this community-based effort is still in its early stages, its emphasis on the creation of local initiatives for the problems of at-risk youth has much promise. As a strategy for bringing about the school reforms needed to benefit at-risk youth, we believe it should be widely considered as an alternative to present efforts responding to at-risk youth.

II. STATE-LEVEL INITIATIVES

Nearly every state has responded to the dropout problem by passing initiatives to encourage schools to take action. The initiatives vary widely, and increasingly they appear to recognize the

complexity suggested above by encouraging prevention programs that address a wide variety of problems across all age groups from early childhood and the elementary grades through high school and even adulthood. Much state funding targets particular groups who have high dropout rates or who are assumed to be at a critical stage in their development as students. For example, Illinois funds a special Hispanic dropout prevention initiative because of this group's high rate of academic failure. Indiana has established nine categories to assist schools in developing special programs. These have led to the development of pre-school and kindergarten programs, the creation of model alternative schools, and expanded school counseling. Minnesota funds a number of initiatives including early childhood screening, programs for minor parents and adult diploma completion. Ohio offers schools money for full-day kindergartens, adolescent pregnancy programs and summer schools that also provide jobs for teens (Fennimore 1989). These examples illustrate the diversity, but also the fragmentation, that exists in the initiatives states offer to encourage schools to serve at-risk students.

While the programs funded from these state initiatives may well succeed in meeting some needs of targeted groups, offering categorical funds to schools creates several obstacles to more comprehensive and systemic reforms designed to benefit at-risk students. First, schools are free not to respond to many state initiatives. Local control of schools makes it difficult for state policymakers to require action or to hold schools accountable for succeeding with at-risk students. If there is no strong sense of accountability at the school level to

develop programs for at-risk youth, state sponsored initiatives can often be ignored and the needs of at-risk students will not be met.

Second, categorical programs tend to be "add ons" to existing school programs and structure. Add-on programs have several inherent weaknesses. They tend to leave present school policies and practices untouched that contribute to the problems of students in danger of dropping out. They treat at-risk students as if they are clearly identifiable and different from "normal" students when, if fact, research indicates that many youth exhibit to some extent most of the problems that characterize those who drop out (Wehlage et al., 1989). Finally, when whole schools are comprised of at-risk students, add-on programs are poorly designed to respond to the need for systemic innovation and response.

Third, by targeting particular groups at particular times, categorical programs prevent the development of sustained, longitudinal strategies that identify at-risk students early and then systematically support them continuously at each school level to graduation. Many at-risk students need a form of continuous attention if they are to complete school successfully.

Fourth, most state initiatives do not facilitate the development of horizontal strategies that link schools to other institutions in the community that are in a position to serve at-risk youth. This linking of diverse community resources including business and social services to school efforts would appear crucial in addressing the main causes of dropping out.

These limitations of current state initiatives indicate some criteria that policymakers at the state and local levels should employ if they wish to develop comprehensive and effective strategies to address the dropout problem. The criteria include the need for: (1) local accountability, (2) school by school regeneration and reform, (3) longitudinal strategies, and (4) horizontal coordination.

Local accountability is essential if sustained effort from schools is to be forthcoming. The fact of community control of schools in this country, as well as the difficulty of implementing reforms mandated at the federal and state level, suggest that a practical mechanism of accountability must almost certainly be locally controlled (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Farrar et al., 1980; Mehan et al., 1986). Further, local accountability is needed in response to the particular conditions of a community, its youth and schools, and to the broad membership of that community including the parents of youth most at risk.

Any comprehensive dropout prevention strategy should have as a central feature the examination of present school policies and practices, particularly those that affect students most at risk. In part, this will require each school to examine carefully and thoughtfully why some of its students fail and become alienated enough to leave before graduation. The implication here is that dropout prevention must include a mechanism that promotes a process of reflection and self-examination at the individual school as well as the district levels. If such a process occurs, resulting program

initiatives are more likely to have a positive impact on schools and students as a whole.

Finally, dropout prevention strategies that are both longitudinal and horizontal provide a means for dealing with the complex set of background, personal and school conditions that can affect students. Longitudinal and horizontal strategies will require considerable effort on the part not only of educators but also of other professionals from youth-serving institutions including the private sector who need to engage in a coordinated planning, implementation and monitoring process. From an educational perspective, this kind of strategy is almost certainly necessary if some leverage is to be gained over non-school social and personal problems that interfere with students' academic success.

This paper describes an initiative that could potentially elicit more accountability and school-based reflection as well as encourage the development of the longitudinal and horizontal programmatic responses we believe necessary to reduce the incidence of dropout. The Annie E. Casey Foundation's New Futures Initiative is a project aimed at helping several communities take responsibility for responding to their at-risk youth. The Casey Foundation has invested $50 million over a five-year period to create a community partnership in each of five cities intended to bring about increased school achievement, reduced dropout and teen pregnancy rates, and increased young adult employment. While New Futures is concerned with much more than school improvement and reform, in this paper we focus primarily on the educational aspects of the initiative. It is hoped that research over

the course of the project will help to advance our understanding of the possibilities as well as the difficulties of integrating schools with their communities, of the role of a broad public mandate for school reform, and of theories of school change.

The New Futures Initiative is a social experiment in progress. At this early stage, it is useful to sketch the broad conceptions which underlie it and to comment on the problems and possibilities that have developed thus far. As the project unfolds, a program of research and evaluation is underway to flesh out a more complete theoretical model that will allow us to generalize from the experience of New Futures.

III. THE COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE AND REFORM

The five cities receiving Casey Foundation grants are Dayton, Ohio; Lawrence, Massachusetts; Little Rock, Arkansas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Savannah, Georgia. Each was selected after an evaluation by the Foundation of its potential to undertake a serious effort on behalf of at-risk youth. Each city submitted a proposal which had to meet a number of criteria including a dollar for dollar match of the Foundation's grant.

In each city, the heart of New Futures is a new organization called a "community collaborative" charged with the responsibility for planning, coordinating and implementing specific youth-serving programs. The collaborative is obligated to promote fundamental institutional changes that will increase the quality of services provided for at-risk youth. The principles of community collaboration that underlie the Casey Foundation's New Futures Initiative have been

spelled out in "A Strategic Planning Guide for the New Futures Initiative" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1987; 1989).

The collaborative structure is intended to "trigger and sustain a political process which is powerful enough not only to modify the services that institutions provide, but actually redefine institutional objectives, as well as how those institutions are held accountable and how they interrelate" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1989). Therefore, an essential element of New Futures is building a collaborative with the political authority to plan and execute policy. These new political bodies can establish their formal authority in several ways. For example, in Lawrence, the Lawrence Futures Authority is part of the city's standing Youth Commission; in Dayton the school system serves as the lead agency for the New Futures collaborative; in Little Rock and Pittsburgh new non-profit corporations were created. In Savannah a different route was taken; the state legislature passed special legislation creating the Chatham County-Savannah Youth Futures Authority as a public corporation.

In all the cities, these new institutions have governing boards that broadly represent the community including minority groups, leading business interests, public agencies and private voluntary groups. While representation of interest groups was deemed important, the intent was also to create an institution with enough "clout" to bring about alignment between youth services and the needs of youth. In each city, the political power of the collaborative comes in large measure from the status and influence of those individuals who exercise leadership on the governing board. The success of a collaborative

depends on its ability to perform the following functions: identify the problems of youth in the community and critique the effectiveness of current institutional efforts; create and legitimate policy and plans for dealing with youth issues; raise new money and reallocate existing resources within agencies; settle "turf" issues over the delivery of services to youth; and finally, establish a form of "case management" that provides the day-to-day coordination of a community's services to individual youth and their families.

Collaborative boards are representative of their communities' interest groups and agencies. For example, in Savannah, the Chatham County-Savannah Youth Futures Authority is a fifteen-member board drawn from the city council, county commission, the school board and state government as well as substantial representation from the private sector. A minority member of the city council was appointed executive director of the Savannah Youth Futures Authority, and he, the city manager and several corporation chief executive officers have taken strong leadership roles in the planning, policymaking and implementation phases. Savannah Youth Futures has been successful in part because of the stature, representativeness and skills possessed by these individuals, and they have given the collaborative and its initiatives credibility in the community.

According to New Futures' guidelines, collaboratives are to be vehicles for creating plans of action and then monitoring the success of those plans. Ultimately, the success of a plan must be judged in terms of its impact on the lives of youth. The cities will assess this impact through a set of ten outcome indicators stipulated by the Casey

Foundation. Most of the ten indicators measure schools' success with students: academic achievement, course failures, retentions in grade, suspensions, average daily attendance, dropout rate, graduation rate, teenage pregnancies and births, young adult employment, and post-secondary attendance and GED rates.

These indicators have been accepted by each collaborative as the measures by which the conditions of youth will be described. This set of indicators will also say something about the condition of local schools, and thus, offer criteria for evaluating the progress of institutional reform efforts. Finally, these indicators constitute a data base that will become heart of each collaborative's Management Information System (MIS), a New Futures requirement of each city. A program of technical assistance sponsored by the Foundation during the first year and a half has helped the cities to develop fairly sophisticated data management systems. When fully operational, the MIS will permit each collaborative to monitor important aspects of youth welfare and to determine the effectiveness of institutional programs and reforms.

To summarize, New Futures is a strategy of local empowerment built on the assumption that a community-wide effort is needed to bring together the spectrum of players in a position to create local youth policy. New Futures promotes longitudinal and horizontal strategies of responding to youth and their problems. The longitudinal strategy is designed to provide early identification of students who are in need, and the horizontal strategy is intended to coordinate youth services across institutions. However, New Futures also is

committed to bringing about institutional change in youth-serving organizations, particularly schools. Central to this process of change is the creation of a collaborative with sufficient political power and moral authority to sanction new institutional practices. In part, this requires establishing a climate of accountability along with reliable information that measures the extent of problems and the impact of new institutional efforts designed to serve youth.

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

The basic philosophy of New Futures is that with financial and technical assistance local communities can be empowered to respond to the needs of at-risk youth. As the fulcrum in this empowerment process, the collaborative must create a climate in which the community becomes accountable for responding to the problems of at-risk youth. Accountability means accepting responsibility for developing youth policy, creating resources and coordinating institutional programs to deal effectively with the problems that place youth at risk. It calls on middle-class citizens and the institutions they represent to act in ways that will empower all youth with essential skills, knowledge and dispositions to participate fully in the society.

A New Futures guidebook states that "New Futures views many of these youth problems in terms of the failure of community institutions to do what they can do to equip youngsters with the expectations, opportunities, supports and incentives they need to become aspiring, responsible and successful adults" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1989). For example, the lack of attractive employment opportunities makes

success in school seem hollow for many young people. From the New Futures perspective, the dropout problem must be addressed partly by creating new economic opportunities in the local community for high school graduates. Consequently, in each city, New Futures requires public promises to create new employment opportunities for at-risk youth. This kind of commitment to action is necessary to change both the perception and reality of opportunity for youth.

The development of New Futures in each city resulted in similar action plans that started with gathering accurate information about the nature and extent of problems encountered by young people. Questions were asked regarding how many youth were dropping out, becoming pregnant, unemployed, and unemployable. Many citizens in each community had no detailed information about the conditions of their youth. To remedy this situation, data were collected about the precursors of dropping out, i.e., the rates of course failure, retention in grade and suspension. These data were reported in an early Casey Foundation document and provide a baseline for subsequent comparisons to measure school system progress (Academy for Educational Development, 1989).

The frequent incidence of course failure, which leads to credit deficiency and discouragement about prospects for graduation, was clearly identified as a problem in several systems. For example, the Dayton secondary schools reported extraordinarily high course failure rates during 1987-88 (Table 1).

Table 1

Percentage of Dayton Students Failing One or More Courses

gr 7	gr 8	gr 9	gr 10	gr 11	gr 12
63.5	68.4	78.6	75.5	64.4	49.5

Pittsburgh, unlike a number of urban school systems, is viewed by its community as having responded vigorously to important educational problems in recent years. While a case can be made for this system's success in a number of areas, data from the school year 1987-88 indicate that the crucial problem of academic failure persists across the secondary grades (Table 2).

Table 2

Percentage of Pittsburgh Students Failing One or More Courses

gr 7	gr 8	gr 9	gr 10	gr 11	gr 12
29.7	31.4	58.9	53.7	40.9	32.2

With course failure comes retention or credit deficiency toward graduation. The prospect of going to high school for five or six years is not acceptable for many youth, especially if a student is overage as the result of a previous retention. From a student perspective, the message conveyed by course failure and retention is a discouraging one and dims the prospects of graduating from high school on time, if at all.

Some school systems were retaining fairly large numbers of students at the secondary level. Savannah, for example, had the highest rates of retention (Table 3).

Table 3

Percentage of Savannah Students Retained in Grade, 1987-88

gr 7	gr 8	gr 9	gr 10	gr 11
19.5	16.1	36.8	22.6	22.3

Suspension is another school practice which can discourage students and lead to dropping out. Data on suspensions reveal rather high rates across all grades in some cities, while in others the rates are high in only certain grades. Tables 4 and 5 report suspension rates that suggest the middle school/junior high years are difficult ones for some students.

Table 4

Number of Suspensions as a Percentage of Student Enrollment in Lawrence, 1987-88

gr 7	gr 8	gr 9	gr 10	gr 11	gr 12
41.2	42.5	58.7	42.7	37.2	20.0

Table 5

Number of Suspensions as a Percentage of Student Enrollment in Little Rock, 1987-88

gr 7	gr 8	gr 9	gr 10	gr 11	gr 12
33.8	32.7	33.7	10.7	8.1	5.5

While such data may be typical of many urban systems, these conditions are not acceptable to New Futures cities. Members of the collaboratives interpreted the evidence as indicative of serious

underlying problems within their school systems. These data made it difficult to imagine high quality education occurring in schools where more than half of the students are failing a course, or more than a third of the students in a grade are being retained, or the suspension rate is more than fifty percent in a grade. In such cases, it was argued that the school system had failed to educate an important segment of its students, and that fundamental school reforms were needed to engage young people in school learning.

V. SCHOOL REFORMS: THE STRUGGLE FOR "TOP-DOWN" AND "BOTTOM-UP"

Much of the school reform effort aimed at the at-risk population has been stimulated by a variety of "top-down" state-level initiatives. In contrast, there is also a "bottom-up" strategy that calls for schools to engage in "restructuring" and self-improvement efforts (David, 1989; Elmore, 1988; Marsh and Bowman, in press). This approach assumes that schools are more likely to be revitalized one school at a time as staffs grapple with fundamental issues involving pedagogy, curriculum and school organization. Some of these restructuring efforts have taken on a national scope, such as those schools that have adopted the Coalition of Essential Schools approach growing out of Ted Sizer's work (Sizer, 1986). Other reform efforts are more local and indigenous, like the one under development in Louisville's Jefferson County Schools (Schlechty et al., 1988). The Southern Coalition For Educational Equity, a regional program, brings staff development resources to schools interested in improving the quality of teaching

for disadvantaged black youth (David, 1989; Davidson & Koppenhaver, 1988; Southern Coalition for Education Equity, 1985).

The Casey Foundation's New Futures Initiative differs from most of the current efforts at school reform because it simultaneously attempts to encourage both a "top-down" and a "bottom-up" process. Its focus on communities places school reform within the context of a local political process authorized and directed by the collaborative. As a "top-down" reform strategy, New Futures offers a set of ideas and principles backed up with funding and a program of technical assistance. Each city's educational plan was shaped in accordance with a "Strategic Planning Guide" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1987) during the first year, followed by an "Implementation Guide for the New Futures Initiative" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1989) for developing the second year plan.

In addition to conveying the New Futures philosophy, these documents offer examples of successful or promising school practices and a process of planning and implementation. However, no specific model of "effective schools" is prescribed by New Futures; it is assumed, instead, that a "bottom-up" process of reform will emerge from the schools. Further, it is assumed that the community consensus established by the collaborative about the severity of youth problems and the need for action authorizes a relatively bold plan of school reform. This authorization should permit schools to proceed with an agenda that might not be possible if it emanated solely from educators themselves.

It is premature to arrive at any conclusions about the effectiveness of the New Futures Initiative as a general model for school reform or to make judgments about the degree of reform achieved in any particular school or school system. Presently, it is more instructive to offer some examples and observations about strategies associated with the initiative that appear to hold promise for substantive school reform as well as some of the obstacles that have been encountered.

According to the theory of school reform advanced by New Futures, collaboratives must develop enough political authority to hold their school systems accountable for developing clear visions and plans of action. Furthermore, school programs are to be longitudinal and horizontal in conception, not simply discrete "add-on" programs for groups of youth who can be categorized as at risk. Some progress has been made in this strategy, but given the ambitious, complex and innovative conception of the New Futures Initiative, the process has lurched forward slowly and unevenly in most of the cities. For example, leaders in the collaboratives and school administrators have not always agreed about the focus and substance of school reform efforts. More frequently, even the best ideas have been slow to take root because they were conceived at the top, and educators in buildings targeted for the New Futures Initiative were brought into the planning process late, or even not at all. Where plans were imposed on school sites without extensive involvement of building-level professionals, understanding and ownership of the plans were lacking. This top-down strategy of trying to gain acceptance and achieve implementation of

programs often occurred in contexts where educators felt besieged with problems, and carrying out something new called New Futures was laid on top of what was already a difficult set of tasks.

In some cases, teachers were not well informed about the purposes of New Futures and tended to see it as one more "trendy" idea that would soon pass out of style, and so one need not take the rhetoric too seriously. In other cases, neither building-level educators nor central office administrators believed the essential tenet, that given the right school conditions all youth can be successful. Consequently, some school reform plans lacked inventiveness and are now leading to little more than "tinkering" with conventional institutional arrangements. Some proposals reaffirmed the belief that the real problem of at-risk youth was to be found in the pathology of their homes. This view suggested there was no need to change what occurred in schools; if parents would only value education, discipline their children and support the school, then the problem of at-risk students would be greatly diminished. In settings where these conditions prevailed, it was unlikely that educators would reconsider their practices and see the possibilities in a school reform plan endorsed by a collaborative seeking fundamental change in educational results.

In schools where staff had not been part of the process of assessing the need for reforms and then planning a set of responses, business has continued as usual. Thus, practices initially called into question by the collaboratives remain in place. For example, many schools have continued to suspend, fail and retain large numbers of students because of deep-seated institutional beliefs about how best to

control students. Long-standing methods of discipline and habitually cold or even hostile social relations between adults and adolescents have resisted change, partly because of cultural inertia and routinized practice, partly because of the absence of any models of how schools might be organized differently, and partly because of the lack of vision about how teaching and learning might be different. In short, the presence of substantial new money from the Casey Foundation and the authorization from collaboratives to change schools to better serve at-risk students has not been sufficient to immediately generate rapid institutional change of the magnitude needed in New Futures schools.

However, neither the speed nor the tentative steps initially taken toward substantive reforms in most of the school systems are indicative of the fundamental change envisioned and of the possibilities for its achievement in the long run. To illustrate the school reform process now set in motion by the Casey Foundation, we present two examples--Dayton and Savannah. These were chosen not because all their efforts have been exemplary nor have they somehow avoided serious problems, but because New Futures in these two cities provides a set of possibilities for school reform that can be instructive to other communities considering the collaborative approach. By focusing on Dayton and Savannah, we offer some evidence of where New Futures school reform may be heading.

VI. DAYTON

Dayton's school reform effort began with a focus on two middle schools with high concentrations of at-risk students. Four strategies

were initiated: a home-based guidance program to increase informal counseling of students, an extended school day to accommodate a wide range of extra-curricular activities, a corps of case managers to work with at-risk youth in and out of school, and the division of the two middle schools into "clusters" of five core subject teachers with 150 students. The intent was to develop these strategies and then transfer them to other schools in the district.

As in most of the other New Futures cities, these strategies were largely planned and implemented in a top-down manner from the central office and collaborative. Neither principals nor teachers at the two New Futures schools were significantly involved in the initial development of the strategies they were asked to implement. The issues of school reform identified by administrators were not always of immediate concern to most staff in the New Futures schools. Instead of being worried about high failure, suspension and dropout rates, building-level educators were more concerned about what they saw as a lack of student discipline and a declining level of student engagement in school work.

This discontinuity between definitions of the "problem" initially produced confusion, frustration and even anger. Those at the school level responsible for carrying out Dayton's plan had little initial understanding or stake in the programs. Perhaps because some content in the overall plan was the result of input from groups external to the school, even central office personnel demonstrated minimal commitment to the implementation of the agenda they had ostensibly adopted and endorsed. For example, the staff person assigned primary

responsibility for implementing the plan was given no line authority over the two New Futures schools. In addition, the Dayton collaborative has been slow to understand the difficulties of establishing momentum for reform at the school building level; for several months, its failure to exercise a sufficient measure of political authority allowed the school system to proceed with the implementation of the New Futures proposal with little sense of direction or broader purpose.

Despite these problems, the Dayton New Futures staff in conjunction with the school district has begun to develop an implementation and training strategy. In part, this strategy was the result of the Casey Foundation's own commitment to oversee New Futures development in Dayton (and the other cities) by providing technical assistance that would initiate movement on the reform agenda. A New Futures Management Team consisting of school and non-school administrators was eventually created to air problems of coordination and implementation. While this brought about communication at the upper levels of New Futures, it did not solve the problem of a lack of commitment and accountability at the building level for making school reforms work. Furthermore, it became clear during the year that few building-level personnel possessed the skills in group process and conflict resolution required to create allegiance to a school-wide reform effort.

To develop the necessary skills and allegiance, two steps were taken. The first has involved a move toward greater participation of teachers in decision making at the school level. The two middle school

principals have accepted the district's commitment to site-based management and shared governance, and they have begun to involve teachers in decisions about the implementation of *New Futures*. Each cluster developed a plan for the second year which was submitted to the Management Team. In addition, each school developed a mission statement and school-wide goals consistent with New Futures.

Second, a series of training workshops have occurred. All teachers in the two schools were required to attend a week-long in-service program concentrating primarily on the development of a sense of collective purpose as well as instruction in techniques designed to facilitate small and large-group processes. Teachers interviewed after this training were enthusiastic about what they had learned and expressed a new eagerness to address the implementation of New Futures strategies. Another session was held for cluster leaders to help them take greater leadership in the implementation of new scheduling arrangements, cross-disciplinary instruction and more effective student discipline. Also, a contingent of educators was sent to a Casey Foundation sponsored workshop at the Principal's Institute at Harvard University. Here efforts were made to articulate a clearer vision of school reform. While it remains to be seen if all this training will translate into sustained effort and substantive change for the benefit of at-risk students, it is clear that a level of activity has been generated that was not apparent during the first year. In this regard, Dayton has made considerable progress toward the New Futures reform agenda.

VII. SAVANNAH

In Savannah, a number of school interventions have been developed under the Youth Futures Authority, but four innovations comprise the heart of the early school reform effort. These are: the Comprehensive Competency Program (CCP) laboratories for remediation and accelerated learning, a "modified" curriculum also for remediation and acceleration, a Services To Assist Youth (STAY) team to identify and counsel at-risk students in school, and a set of case managers to work out of school with the most at-risk students. As in Dayton, these strategies have been implemented in two middle schools that have enrolled large populations of at-risk students for many years.

Unlike some of the other school systems, Savannah was ready with many of its programs and began implementation at the beginning of the school year. This was accomplished, in part, because some building level people participated in orientation and training during the summer. Special classrooms were constructed for the CCP labs, and teachers were introduced to the "modified curriculum." The term "modified" refers to the fact that it did not cover all of the objectives in math and English which had been specified by the district's curriculum plan for grades six, seven and eight. This streamlined version of the curriculum was offered to students who had been retained in grade or had tested very low. By reducing the breadth of the curriculum, students could still learn the basic content while at the same time moving through curriculum rapidly.

The two CCP labs, one at each middle school, were designed for those students who were overage because of retention and who had

trouble functioning in regular classrooms. The labs are self-contained mobile classrooms with a capacity for thirty students who spend three hours each day studying math, English, social studies and a version of employment readiness training. The CCP labs are staffed by three specially trained teachers and an aide who help students progress through individualized, programmed learning materials. Most of the time students learn from individualized programmed materials, but there are also audio and video cassettes. One of features students like is using computers that provide instruction, mainly drill and practice.

Neither a modified curriculum nor programmed learning labs are novel. What is novel is that Savannah turned what are essentially remedial programs into a form of "accelerated schooling" by promoting during the year those overage students who achieved higher grade level competency. At mid-year, 218 students were promoted at least one grade in the two middle schools. Over one hundred were promoted into high school. This accelerated promotion practice is unusual because ordinarily students who are held back never regain lost ground in the march toward graduation.

The impact on students, educators and some adults in the community from the mid-year promotions was electric. For students who had previously failed and been held back, the remediation/acceleration strategy produced quick and visible success. For the first time in years, disheartened and alienated youth were encouraged to believe they could learn and even expect to graduate from high school.

For some educators and members of the community, it was a pleasant but unexpected surprise to discover the relative ease with

which some of the most failure prone students were able to master basic skills and content in the modified courses and OCP labs. One implication was that many other students across the system who had failed and been held back might also be capable of learning with the proper encouragement and environment. This created some troubling questions. What should the school system do about other overage students? And what about the practice of failing large numbers of students in the first place? Why was this necessary? And how was it that these "difficult" students with records of repeated misbehavior could now become engaged in their school work rather than in disruptive acts? Was it possible that some frequently used disciplinary practices, like suspension, were in need of reconsideration?

It was over issues such as these that tension developed between the school system and the collaborative. The collaborative perceived a need for substantial effort from the schools to overcome past practices of retention and suspension that created dismal educational futures for so many youth. It occurred to some people that such practices were part of the problem surrounding low achievement and high dropout rates. The collaborative pushed for a reconsideration of these practices and also for an expansion of New Futures programs, like the modified curriculum and OCP labs, that had demonstrated the capacity to regenerate hope for disadvantaged youth.

While the school system was sympathetic with these requests, other pressing issues called for attention. Court-ordered desegregation had to be factored into any decision about programs, and New Futures created a problem. Because of its popularity among

students and parents, requests for transfer into the program tended to create racial imbalance. There was a shortage of classroom space, and it would be difficult at best to expand New Futures with its reduced class size formula. And there was always the vague but omnipresent concern among some school people that, given the nature of the community, they must develop programs attractive to middle class parents, mainly white, who could choose to send their children to a private school rather than to reform their schools in ways that would improve the outcomes for at-risk students. The argument was heard that if the middle class became discouraged and left the public schools, financial support for the system would be eroded. These concerns, plus the fact that the school system had not yet developed a system-wide school reform plan for at-risk students, made extension of New Futures appear to be an impossible task, at least in the short run.

A major success in Savannah was that the collaborative has functioned as a constructive critic of the school system during the first year and a half of New Futures. Some of this criticism was well-received by the schools and some of it was not. No doubt at times educators felt beleaguered, and sometimes the school system saw itself becoming a scapegoat for almost every ill besetting Savannah youth. Nevertheless, the collaborative succeeded in performing a function that is crucial to the success of New Futures; i.e., keeping the needs and interests of at-risk youth high on the community's agenda.

That the Savannah schools are being held to public scrutiny as they never were before is demonstrated by the publication of a local tabloid just before the start of the 1989-90 school year. This forty-

two page newspaper analyzed in depth the Savannah schools. The headline on the front page greets the reader with, "SCHOOLS IN CRISIS." The articles cover a wide array of topics from suspension and failure rates to test scores by school, but also includes several features on New Futures activities. It also indicates that some of Savannah's private schools rate very highly in comparison to those in the public sector. The upshot of this kind of journalism is to maintain visibility for issues about the quality of schools, and this is consistent with the New Futures agenda.

VIII. CONCLUSION

While the New Futures Initiative has generated activities in Dayton, Savannah and the other cities that appear to meet at least some of the criteria set out earlier in this article, it is too early to know whether these specific activities will constitute systemic reforms that enhance the educational outcomes of most students at risk of school failure and dropping out. As we continue to follow the progress of this initiative, a set of unresolved questions will inform our research.

One question concerns the success of collaboratives in representing more than the traditional power elite of a community. While efforts have been made to solicit the participation of people from diverse constituencies within each city, in nearly all cases the New Futures collaboratives remain dominated by traditional power-holders: business executives, superintendents, agency heads, and/or planners associated with civic and regional governments. In many

respects, the New Futures Initiative resembles progressive social movements that have dominated our national response to issues of poverty and deprivation throughout most of the twentieth century. To its credit, New Futures is unique in its attempt to nurture local decision-making. In the past most such efforts, regardless of whether they have been initiated at the national or local level, have tended to ignore the active involvement and empowerment of populations deemed to be at risk. The participation of these often disregarded stakeholders in the development and implementation of New Futures programs may be an essential component to the institutionalization of strategies capable of improving their conditions and futures.

A second question involves the success of the collaboratives in bringing about change. Whether the individuals who comprise the collaboratives, despite their power and access to resources, have the ability to sustain the restructuring of their community's youth delivery systems, including schools, remains to be seen. The delicate balance between criticism and support in the public arena is often difficult to manage toward productive ends. If the schools are to begin addressing the educational requirements of non-middle-class students who have traditionally been poorly served in conventional classrooms, they apparently need to be spurred to action by an aroused citizenry. At the same time, action by educators needs to be informed by a process of reflection and experimentation that will not necessarily lead to quick results and public satisfaction. If New Futures collaboratives are to be successful in their efforts to reform public education, they must learn how both to demand and to encourage,

to reveal weaknesses but also to acknowledge strengths, and to understand the difficulty inherent in altering long-accepted educational practices. However, this kind of perspective is rare, and it is unclear whether members of the collaboratives in the New Futures cities are inclined to see their interaction with schools and other agencies in this way.

The third question is tied to the issue of top-down and bottom-up reform. Will educators respond favorably to a reform agenda whose broad outlines are articulated outside the school? What is to prevent the New Futures Initiative, even if it were to gain broad public support, from encountering the same fate as the multiplicity of other reform efforts sponsored by the state and federal governments during the past thirty years? The consensus appears to be that despite repeated attempts at introducing reform and improvement, schools have succeeded in deflecting and absorbing these efforts and remain relatively unchanged. Current experience in each of the five cities finds the school system, from time to time, successful in resisting the kinds of fundamental changes that many believe necessary if at-risk youth are to make significant educational progress. At issue is whether members of the New Futures collaboratives and their educational allies are able to develop strategies that result in building-level implementation and ownership of the reform process itself. Accomplishing this goal will not be easy, and a central part of our research task will be to study the ways in which such implementation and ownership is or is not encouraged.

A variety of factors, therefore, could stand in the way of a successful outcome to the New Futures social experiment. As an experiment, however, the New Futures focus on local accountability, thoughtful responses to institutional changes that reflect local conditions, and the development of longitudinal and horizontal strategies to address the needs of at-risk children has much to commend it. Issues of ownership and involvement often ignored by state or federally mandated reforms are being acknowledged in ways that could potentially lead to the development of a broad commitment to the welfare of all children in the five New Futures cities.

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